

## [Lhasa Hotel Boom: The Back Story](#)

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### **China in Fairy Land: The Back-story behind the Hotel Construction Boom in Lhasa 2011 - Huge Hotels, Property Speculators & Mass Tourism in a Remote Corner of Tibet**

This is a story about the biggest tourism destination in Tibet, bigger than the holy city of Lhasa, even though few Tibetans know this eastern edge of Tibet. Attracting one and a half million Chinese tourists a year in 2002, three million a year by 2008, the Dzitsa Degu valleys are among the last remaining homes of the giant panda.

In the hope of conserving pandas, and preserving an exquisitely beautiful landscape in which Tibetans have lived and farmed for many centuries, UNESCO put Dzitsa Degu on its World Heritage list, at the urging of scientists. But this designation has been the downfall of Dzitsa Degu, rather than its salvation. Instead of saving the pandas—which have not been sighted in Dzitsa Degu now for years—Chinese bureaucratic entrepreneurs cashed in on the natural capital of the beauty of these steep valleys, and the social capital of World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve awarded by UNESCO. Chinese tourism enterprises, with patronage at the highest political level, converted natural and social capital into monetary capital, making huge profits. These profits were captured by enterprises enclosing, surrounding and now suffocating the nature reserve, driving away any remaining pandas, and now driving out the Tibetans too, all in the name of conservation.

The key to this story is **Dèng Hóng**, who first made his fortune in remote Jiuzhaigou, in partnership with InterContinental hotel chain; and in 2011 is now using his wealth and inner connections with the Communist Party—he is now a member of the National Peoples Congress—to build the biggest hotel Lhasa has ever seen, the Lhasa InterContinental, to open end of 2012.

The fairy lands of the nine stockade Tibetan villages exist today in a Chinese hyper reality, a timeless and space-less world cut off from history and the Tibetan world, from the surrounding grasslands, nomads and the repetitions of Han-Tibetan conflict over many centuries.

Jiuzhaigou—the Nine Stockade Village Valley—and nearby Huanglong—the Yellow Dragon—are magnetic attractors of wealth and quintessentialised Chineseness for today's cadres and tour operators. Three hundred busloads a day disgorge an endless stream of strangers into this fairyland of crystal pools and streams, forests and snow capped mountains, and to the five star resorts, luxury villas for the new rich, karaoke bars and discos at their gates.

This fantasy land serves as background for mainland Han, Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Singapore compatriots to rediscover their essential Chineseness, in a Tibetan landscape. For a day, the visitor can become an emperor strolling his private garden of exquisite nature, a jeweled landscape inspiring the cultivated gentleman to reflect on China's 5000 year heritage, to compose elegantly understated poetry, and then return to comfort and

conviviality. This setting, shorn of Tibetan time and place, is the stage on which Chinesenesses enact a golden age of a long-gone China, in which Confucian literati strolled amid the beauties of nature.

The erasure of its Tibetan history is so insistent that even a scientific report by Chinese scientists for UNESCO in 1999 could report: "The area was an almost virgin land hidden in the high mountains of the northwestern Sichuan Plateau for thousands of years. Local Tibetan people lived a self-sufficient life, having little association with the external world, except through narrow paths for traveling by horse. Outsiders had no knowledge of the rich biological resources of Jiuzhaigou until 1975, when it was simultaneously found to be a rare beauty in the world. And so the prologue of Jiuzhaigou's current heyday was opened."<sup>[1]</sup>

Jiuzhaigou was "discovered" much as European explorers "discovered" the Americas or Australia, immediately relegating those who had inhabited these areas for millennia to incidental natives with scant claim to priority. This landscape was too important to be left to natives, who had clearly failed to develop its' potential.

It is not Tibetan history that is celebrated in these two World Heritage areas and Biosphere Reserves; it is the imagined past of China, transposed onto a Tibetan landscape. It is a past in which Chinese poets and sages wandered in the mountains, composing elegiac verses and with spare brush strokes evoked scenes of ineffable harmony. This is what now draws in the Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Singapore tourists in such numbers. The values China has inscribed onto this Tibetan farmland are evident in the prose of Chinese writers. A glossy official book on all of China's World Heritage sites describes Jiuzhaigou: "The mountains, lakes, natural primeval forest and unique scenes make Jiuzhaigou a fairyland... Scenes change according to the season and the area is particularly colorful in autumn when the wind makes kilometers of tree belt along the lake undulate like a sea wave... trees grow in the water and flowers blossom in the middle of lakes... Sometimes you can see giant pandas."<sup>[2]</sup>

This is quite restrained compared to other Chinese authors. In China Pictorial, in a photo essay titled The Fairyland of Jiuzhaigou, **Ren Hua** writes: "Jiuzhaigou is like a bright pearl mounted in the southeast Qinghai-Tibet Plateau adjacent to the Sichuan Basin. Since few people travelled there, the mountains and valleys were not discovered and developed until the 1970s... Legend has it that Wonosmo, the goddess of the mountain, dropped a mysterious mirror, a love object given by Dag, the god of the mountain, and the broken pieces became more than 100 lakes... The Tibetans praise the Long Lake as 'an unfilled treasure gourd.' There is a majestic view of snowy peaks and glaciers opposite the Long Lake. In addition there are the Five-Flower Lake, calcareous tufa dyke, Twine-Dragon Lake and the Colorful Pond. The Tibetan girls often praise the mountains and lakes in pleasant folk songs."<sup>[3]</sup>

The fairies of what Chinese writers frequently describe as a fairyland are Tibetan fairies, with recognizably Tibetan names, yet when made to serve Chinese arcadia idylls their stories are reduced to sentimental fragments. Timeless mythology abides, while specific Tibetan times and spaces are dehistoricised. Thus Tibetan ancestor myths become legends of China, for Chinese tourists, marking Chinese sites.

Long Lake (Tsoring in Tibetan) is at the farthest point in the tourist circuit, where the sealed road and bus service end, 18 km from the tourist entrance. A recent guidebook, written by an Edinburgh Tibetan, says: "Another steep stone staircase leads down to the lake shore, where local Tibetans are waiting with their docile yaks to dress eager Chinese tourists in Tibetan garb for their personal yak photographs."<sup>[4]</sup> Where the road ends and Tibet begins is a liminal zone in which Chinese tourists can briefly enact fantasies of role reversal, becoming cowboys and peasants, embodying the fantasy of a golden age when life was simple. The photo taken, what was donned is doffed, and normal life is resumed.

This experience caps the visitor's immersion in Jiuzhaigou's "**World of Fairy Tales.**"<sup>[5]</sup> This is the modern cathedral of nature, the sublime experience of communion with the normally elusive world beyond the human, the dissolution of separateness, the overcoming of the distance between man and nature. As a Chinese online guidebook says, "The scenic delights of the Sword Cliff region [of Jiuzhaigou] is of more simplicity, more wild nature and more primeval tranquility. It seems that you have suddenly passed through the time-space continuum, and stepped into the time immemorial."<sup>[6]</sup>

This is a world outside time, in which anything is briefly possible. It is a sacred world, but the sacred lies in the "primeval" forest, the limpid lakes, the pristine peaks, the profusion of flowers and colors. No longer is the sacred grounded in the sacred traditions of the historic population of the valley, although a few Tibetan names linger on. The mountain god Dag whose gift of a mirror to the goddess Wonosmo creates the chains of lakes seems to be the nearby 4,200 m mountain Tibetans call Dege. The goddess whose mirror shattered is more often simply named in Chinese texts as Semo, a Chinese goddess of ancient Chinese legends. Ctrip, which advertises itself as "the leading China hotel reservation network" introduces Jiuzhaigou thus: "Ancient Chinese legend has it that the goddess Semo accidentally smashed her mirror here and the pieces which fell down the mountain formed beautiful lakes, streams and waterfalls."<sup>[7]</sup> Semo's origin is appropriated and blurred, her status as a mountain deity forgotten, as the focus is no longer on the mountains, except as a picturesque backdrop to the narcissistic views to be found in the many small lakes. However, the anthropologist **Charles Ramble** says, "se-mo, in the Bon demonology, designates a class of female spirits who initially manifest as beautiful women and subsequently turn into dangerous hags."<sup>[8]</sup> The semo, and the places named for the many semo of Tibet, are usually local protectors who beguile strangers, then turn on them, often poisoning those who do not belong. They are indeed dangerous to interlopers. Clearly this is not a story contemporary China, fixated on boosting tourism, wishes to tell. The tourism industry finds it far preferable that Semo or Wonosmo be a cipher, a colorful factoid, a decorative artifact of ancient Chinese legend.

However, Semo's peak is not as readily marginalized as the other peaks that frame the views in Jiuzhaigou. Semo is central. In all representations of Jiuzhaigou the basic layout is given as a Y shape, in which the visitor enters at the base and gradually ascends to the fork, then continues up either branch. The streams, the roads and the buses all part at the fork, because Semo is in the middle. Semo lives on in tourist maps as a mount of Venus.

The first view of Semo comes at a lake named for an animal long extinct in China, the rhino (Xiniu Hai in Chinese, Seru Tso in Tibetan). In the words of a current online guidebook: "Rhino Lake is broad and dark blue. The volume of water keeps the same all year round. It was said that the peaceful Rhino Lake was endowed with mysterious power. In the southern bushes, there is a landing stage, where visitors can see to the north Mount Ce Mo (Goddess Mountain)" [9]

The appropriation and trivialization of the gods mirrors the fate of the Tibetans, whose home is Dzitsa Degu, the gully of nine stockade villages fenced with the plentiful timbers of the forest to guard against quarrelsome neighbors, perhaps to also protect against the semo.

From a Tibetan point of view, the Nine Stockade Villages and their 800 Tibetan inhabitants were integral to a culture strongly grounded in connections to Lhasa, to pilgrimage, the sacredness of the mountains, and the ongoing life of the oldest forms of Tibetan spirituality, the pre-Buddhist **Bon** tradition. Until China's quest for essentialised Chinese beauty occurred, the Nine Villages were also integral to a regional economy of seasonal trading between animal product producers and grain growers. This Tibetan world, a complex of cultural, economic and spiritual connections is not only invisible to tourists, but it has been replaced by an alternative Chinese narrative which now explains the unspoiled beauty of Jiuzhaigou prior to the 1970s.

The story told to tourists is somewhat magical, with almost all human presence erased: "Since few people travelled there, the mountains and valleys were not discovered and developed until the 1970s."<sup>[10]</sup> This erases not only the Tibetan rebellions against Chinese power in this area in the 1740s, 1860s and 1920s, but the entire history of Tibetan stewardship of these steep valleys, in the highest rainfall zone of Tibet, in easily eroded limestone country. Tibetan indigenous knowledge is denied, Tibetan traditions of both hunting and biodiversity conservation expunged. Sichuan's "northwestern part, however, cut off by high mountains and special topography, was rarely penetrated. Not until half a century ago, after the Chinese Workers and Peasants' Red Army had marched a long way, only to confront its grim visage, did it become widely known."<sup>[11]</sup> This view from the plains below is an utterly Sino centric conception.

Few Tibetans have ever heard of Jiuzhaigou, a Chinese name which can be translated as Nine Stockade Gully, a reference to the nine Tibetan walled villages of this picturesque area. In 1984 Premier **Zhao Ziyang** drew attention to this remote area by declaring that the famous iconic scenery of Guilin is number one in the world, yet the scenery of Jiuzhaigou ranks even higher than Guilin. This edict by a top leader had the force of law, permitting local county governments to become entrepreneurial without fear of being labeled capitalist roaders, as they would have been only a few years earlier. The officials of Nanping County saw their moment had come. The natural capital of this limestone ravine on a tributary of the Min Jiang, a river feeding into the Yangtze, was ideal for exploitation. While surrounding forests had been heavily logged, the ravine was too steep for commercial logging access, and the nine Tibetan villages in it lived a largely self-sufficient existence with little connection to lowland China. What had seemed a picturesque backwater became a major asset that could for the first time generate considerable wealth for the county cadres.

This coincided with the quintessential landscapes of Guilin, long famed for their beauty, rapidly approaching saturation. It was in China's national interest, at a time when overseas Chinese were responding to invitations to return, to visit ancestral sites and areas of iconic Chineseness, were starting to arrive in such numbers that more destination needed to be created. Guilin was already getting bad press: "Most Westerners find it a big disappointment. The stunning limestone peaks are not much in evidence on Guilin's polluted and congested streets... A combination of heat, hazy skies, industry, congested streets, enormous crowds and tourism hype make Guilin one of China's most overrated travel experiences."<sup>[12]</sup>

Dzitsa Degu—known in Chinese as Jiuzhaigou—was ideal. The long walks up the valleys offered vistas at every turn that seemed to express in harmonious balance the elements of classical Chinese landscape compositions. Framed by snow mountains and clear skies above, and travertine pools of clear water in many colors below, the vistas offer sharp crags, dense rhododendron forest, dramatic limestone karat landforms, waterfalls, spring flowers and autumn colors. This was a landscape representing China's past, when poets and painters sat with brush in hand, ready for the few strokes that make nature art that express the balance of yin and yang. The nine stockade Tibetan villages of Dzitsa Degu were ideal to recreate Chinese tradition most Chinese see only in movies. The name Dzitsa Degu was heard no more. Instead the area was retrofitted with a Chinese lineage: "Formerly 'Ciu Hai' (Green Lake), or 'Yang Tong', Jiuzhaigou was later named for the nine (Jiu in Chinese) Tibetan villages in the gullies."<sup>[13]</sup>

Even with Zhao Ziyang's official endorsement, it took many years for Jiuzhaigou to become a major destination. A decade after Zhao's blessing, the 1994 Lonely Planet guidebook to China lists Jiuzhaigou as a destination only for hardy backpackers willing to brave chaotic transport, abysmal food, dangerous roads, outbreaks of the plague and sightings of UFOs. Visitors are urged to allow a week to 10 days for the round trip by road, as it takes two to three days on overcrowded local buses to get there. Other guidebooks make no mention of Jiuzhaigou at all, or, as the 1989 Fodor's says: "it is isolated and difficult to reach."

Gearing Jiuzhaigou to meet the needs and desires of local, then national and eventually international tourists took much time and money. The wealth needed to steadily upgrade facilities at the entrance to the heritage area was largely generated by retained profits of earlier stages in the resort destination life cycle.

No longer Jiuzhaigou now receives 500,000 paying visitors a year and is promoted as a major destination for foreign as well as domestic tour package buyers. Such numbers have required it to be energetically promoted globally for values represented in lush color sections of magazines, and in equally colorful prose.

For visitors too important to put on buses, there is now a heliport and an airport to lift premium payers out of Chengdu and deliver them at the gates of Jiuzhaigou in an hour. Sichuan province spent 900 million yuan (\$109 million) upgrading the highway to Jiuzhaigou, although the road's sharp turns and commercial turnaround pressure on drivers still means many accidents. In September 2001 several tourists from Hong Kong were killed in a bus crash, which was reported widely in China's official media.

Growth in worldwide promotion of Jiuzhaigou as a destination continues to intensify. A steady upward trend in visitor numbers is expected to continue its exponential growth. This is not only a commercial success, attracting the masses in sufficient numbers to steadily increase hotel construction and marketing budgets, it is also a triumph for a Communist Party whose claim to legitimacy is in part its opening of imperial elite treasure places to mass access.

A major factor in the promotion of Jiuzhaigou is that quite early in the trajectory of its destination life cycle it was accorded official world heritage status by UNESCO. The United Nations has now doubly inscribed Jiuzhaigou, having granted it a listing on the register of World Heritage Sites in 1992, then in 1997 UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) added Jiuzhaigou to its list of the world's biosphere reserves. Nearby Huanglong is likewise doubly honored by UNESCO.

It is the genius of contemporary Chinese bureaucratic entrepreneurialism to parlay such intellectual capital, and the natural capital of the landscape into a rapidly growing rate of return on financial capital.

These seals of global approval have enormous value in attracting tourists, but they also mean considerable scientific scrutiny of China's management of these destinations. There are few other parts of Tibet under such intense scientific gaze. Many of the scientific assessments and plans for future management are publicly available. Thus it is possible to see both through Chinese official eyes and the eyes of scientists how the future of Jiuzhaigou is mapped, and what part the Tibetans of the nine villages play in it.

All available documentation on Jiuzhaigou—from glossy tourist brochures to dry scientific reports—are all predicated on the assumption that Jiuzhaigou is one of the rare places where the split between man and the biosphere, culture and nature can be overcome. The pre-existing reality of this separation is taken for granted as self-evident, and is deeply inscribed in the actual title of the UNESCO program. Only a few special places on Earth are so wonderful that this gulf can be dissolved, and man can feel at one with nature, and at one with himself, to use the masculine usage adopted by UNESCO.

Given this axiomatic assumption, the existence of humans, both resident and passing, in such a place is bound to be problematic. There are inevitable tensions and contradictions, which all those concerned with management, both Chinese and international, frequently acknowledge. Yet the sheer weight of numbers, as mass tourism intensifies, pushes this site and its Tibetan inhabitants inexorably in one direction. From the moment China discovered Jiuzhaigou in 1975, in the final throes of the Cultural Revolution, the fate of the Tibetans was in question, because Jiuzhaigou was no longer a people-place, in which people and place are together, inseparable, compatible, mutually sustaining, and interdependent. Whether Tibetans have a place in paradise, whether they are to be seen as intrusions into the wilderness, compromising the integrity of fairy land, was questionable from the moment modern China first discovered the area. Now those questions have hardened into answers, rigidly excluding Tibetans from their gardens and farms, in the name of science, wilderness and beauty.

This is a story worth telling from the start. China started campaigning for World Heritage listing of Jiuzhaigou in 1982, only three years after intensive logging of the Minshan

range, in which Jiuzhaigou is located, was exhausted. An anthropologist, **Hill Gates**, in her 1988 field diary recorded her impressions on the road approaching Jiuzhaigou: "Many of the hills we now drive through are logged off, stripped and eroding... The valley we ascend is dotted with logging towns interspersed with Tibetan villages in which the houses are all now made of stone, fortress like... The little van cruises along an astonishingly good road, the main route to Tibet, carrying timber from the interior and military convoys back."<sup>[14]</sup>

It took a decade to achieve the World Heritage status, a further five years to attain Biosphere Reserve inscription. Initially, when Jiuzhaigou was first brought to China's national gaze the Tibetan villages were seen as intrinsic, part of the color and exotic variety of the landscape. They were not a major part of the attractions, nor were they seen as problematic or contradictory to the purposes of creating a tourist spectacle. On the sliding scale of nature and culture as polar opposites, the Tibetans were clearly closer to the nature end, almost part of the fauna. There was no question of including them as stakeholders in the planning and management of the tourism enterprise, nor was there any suggestion that they should be expelled. This is not an uncommon fate for indigenous communities when metropolitan capital chooses to locate major enterprises in indigenous homelands.

A ravine too steep for logging, a chain of Tibetan villages too backward to be worth bothering about, became the key to Nanping's wealth. What had been peripheral, useless, best left to its own devices, was suddenly central. Jiuzhaigou was a remote part of Nanping County, and it was the overwhelmingly Chinese county seat that officially spoke for all, including the Tibetans. The interests of the largely urban cadres, based in Nanping town, not only predominated but were the only voices permissible in public. In Nanping County in 1994, the population was already over 70% Chinese, with under 30% being Tibetan.<sup>[15]</sup> Official Chinese figures for 1994 list the Chinese population as 38 700, and Tibetans as 14 500. Local cadres could plan careers for their children involving glamorous contact with Chinese compatriots from wealthy areas. This was a new world.

Much the same was true in the neighboring county of Zungchu (in Tibetan) or Songpan in Chinese, which administers Huanglong World Heritage area (meaning Yellow Dragon in Chinese). The scenery was similarly evocative of classic Chinese landscapes, and from a scientific point of view, the two areas, if administered as a unit, had potential as areas of bamboo forest in which dwindling panda numbers could be restored, after the devastation caused by recent logging. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre states: "Extensive logging took place between 1972 and 1979 and concern about this prompted the proposal of the area as an area of scenic beauty and historic interest by the State Council of the People's Republic of China in 1982."<sup>[16]</sup> The deforestation was so severe that the Min river, which drains the Min Shan range, dropped its stream flow discharge by 11.5% permanently.<sup>[17]</sup> The destruction of the forests was due not only to logging but subsequent fires, which have left the sunnier and drier southern slopes bare of forest re-growth, even fifty years after initial clearing and fire. A professional forester **Daniel Winkler** observed during fieldwork that: "In Zitsa Degu traces of forest fires were abundant everywhere except on moist north-facing slopes. Wide areas of forest were

burned out completely in the late 1950s or early 1960s, leaving behind only a few old trees within young pine stands.”<sup>[18]</sup>

The drop in rainfall and runoff to the river as a result of deforestation remain major threats to the habitat of the pandas. When the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) assented to the inscription of both Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong in 1992, the decision of the Committee noted that both: “belong to the same ecological unit, despite being under different county administrations.”<sup>[19]</sup> UNESCO asked China to make them one site, “and consider submitting a revised nomination for inscription as a unified site.” China’s official delegate promised to give this due consideration. Nothing happened.

Songpan county cadres had as much interest in keeping the sites separate as did Nanping. Rent seeking opportunities for controlling wealth creation would only be diluted by sharing a single site. In 1998 UNESCO again: “urged the Chinese authorities to implement the recommendations of the Committee, made at the time of inscription of this site [Huanglong] and Jiuzhaigou in 1992, to link the two sites into a single Minshan Mountain World Heritage Area... The mission also urged the Chinese authorities to explore possibilities for linking Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong World Heritage sites and other giant panda reserves as appropriate.”<sup>[20]</sup> Again, nothing further happened.

The situation of the pandas was becoming critical. In Jiuzhaigou in 1983, American zoologist **George Schaller** noted: “Bamboo is scarce, and pandas are only rare visitors.”<sup>[21]</sup> By 1996 there were only 17 pandas left in Jiuzhaigou, and a 1989 survey by China’s Ministry of Forests and the World Wildlife Fund “describes the population as being small and totally isolated”<sup>[22]</sup> that is why scientists recommended connecting nearby panda reserves, which “gives potential for maintaining or restoring the links between these populations and maintaining gene flow.”

By then much had been invested in establishing Jiuzhaigou as a known brand name, while Minshan remained obscure and unknown. The two counties and their networks of patrons at higher levels were in competition, and were evenly matched. Jiuzhaigou had an advantage in the race to become the brand name recognized as the identifier of a world of meaning, signifying the experience of quintessential Chinese landscape beauty in western China. Jiuzhaigou’s name was better known, and Nanping County capitalized on this by changing its name to Jiuzhaigou County to drive home the brand name message. Songpan County’s advantage is that it is closer to Chengdu, and a shorter bus ride. Songpan County has other major tourist destinations, starting with the county town and its town walls and bridges, some of which are hundreds of years old. The Songpan Grasslands have been promoted to Chinese domestic tourists as a verdant upland in which Chinese can be cowboys for the day in a controlled Tibetan environment, almost the only Tibetan pastoral area marketed to Chinese as a tourist attraction. Yellow Dragon is more evocative of quintessential Chineseness than Nine Village ravine, but Jiuzhaigou has emerged as the iconic destination.

The motivations of local power elites were not the same as the scientists who, from the outset wanted the area to serve as a local instance of a global concern to conserve biodiversity, and were primarily focused on mammals, especially nonhuman ones. By the time UNESCO proposed, for the sake of maintaining the flow of the panda gene pool, that the two areas become a single Minshan Mountain Range World Heritage Area,

Jiuzhaigou was well on the way to becoming a brand name known all over China, with Huanglong not far behind. To erase these names for the locally inclusive, geographically correct but utterly unknown Minshan, would have been to throw away a decade of brand building.

For global science, species conservation was a top priority, for China iconic beauty and a UNESCO classification of any sort came first. The scientists' reports as to the merits of both sites always used remarkably different language to the lyrical prose of the Chinese promoters. Of the various criteria UNESCO uses to classify World Heritage sites, both are classified as Scenic and Historic Interest Areas, with a suggestion: "that the Chinese authorities prepare a species conservation report in order to investigate the possibility that the site may also qualify for inscription under natural heritage criterion (IV)."<sup>[23]</sup>

In the United Nations Environment Program's World Conservation Monitoring Centre listing of these sites, they are categorized as IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Management Category III, which is as "natural monuments."

These different agendas have persisted, and the contradictions have intensified. The core is the number of humans in these protected biosphere reserves, especially the paying visitors. From the outset, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee "expressed concern over the question of growing human impact in the reserve." By 1998: "the mission team found the site to be congested with tourists; the management has made it too easy for the visitors to enter the site en-masse and in vehicles that drive through the core area. Increasing visitation appears to be leading to mushrooming of several new hotels immediately outside the boundaries of the site."

Tourist numbers continued to grow. The contradictions intensified. Global science, represented by bodies such as UNESCO, UNEP and WWF persisted in wanting animal conservation and biosphere protection uppermost, but they were stuck with the fact that they themselves had classified these areas as natural monuments and areas of scenic and historic interest, all designations suggesting a human perspective. A natural area can be a monument only through human eyes, likewise the judgments that an area is scenic. To label an area of historic interest makes explicit the privileging of the human perspective, making all other mind-possessors part of the objects of the human gaze.

The human gaze is the foreground, the pandas, taking and other rare species are part of the background. But, in an area accorded special status because of its human historic interest, which humans and whose history is celebrated? Until quite recently, the number of Chinese living in this area of nine Tibetan villages was few. The only human history of any depth in the inscribed area is Tibetan history. Not only were both areas Tibetan farming villages, but there is a long history of Sino-Tibetan relations in this frontier zone, that has been airbrushed from contemporary discourse. Tibetans rose in revolt against Chinese metropolitan taxes and control, between 1858 and 1865, and again between 1924 and 1926.<sup>[24]</sup> Tibetan uprisings against Chinese incursions and full-scale invasions, both military and commercial are both centuries old, and as recent as the 1970s. It is this history that contemporary China denies. To concede that Jiuzhaigou did not miraculously manifest out of nowhere is to risk situating it firmly in Tibet, contiguous with the vast Tibetan grassland, and temporally connected with a long history of conflict and contest with China over hegemony.

Further down the Min River there are old Chinese frontier towns, especially Songpan (Zungchu in Tibetan) town, which housed a Chinese garrison for centuries. But the countryside, especially in the upper valleys and side streams of the Min river, which are now the World Heritage areas, were Tibetan, remote and with little Chinese presence until recently. The Qiang, one of China's larger minority ethnicities, live nearby, their stone homes and tall stone watchtowers are testimony to their determined resistance to Chinese invasions from the central Sichuan lowlands over the centuries.

Fortunately these efforts at erasure and amnesia are not met by silence from other sources, as might be the case if these Tibetan villagers were truly timeless, primitive, feudal and incapable of documenting their own culture and history. In fact, Tibetan historians give us a rich picture of the way of life of these valleys over the centuries, right up to and past the conquests of the Chinese Communist Party. Further independent testimony comes from a few anthropologists who have in recent years managed to do fieldwork in Jiuzhaigou.

The picture Tibetan sources give is of a district densely settled by Tibetan standards, of small villages grouped together in co-operative federations, highly self-sufficient, plunging the gentle slopes of valley floors with yaks crossed with cattle, a gentle breed known to Tibetans as **dzo**. They cultivated not only oats and buckwheat but also many vegetables including turnips, beans and cabbages, which grow well in a wet, cool climate. After threshing by village men, and winnowing by the women, the grain was ground to flour to make noodles, and the straw stored on rooftops for use as bedding, kindling and winter feed for domestic animals. The villages also grew flax, which was spun and woven into clothing. Rather than wearing their chuba robes long, as in colder parts, they preferred to hitch them at the knee, and wear leggings of cloth, to keep out the damp and cold. They wore broad brimmed felt hats, often with feathers in them. This picture of daily life comes from the work of Tibetan historians in the 1980s, working to record a Tibetan past and present under intense pressure from official attempts at erasure and appropriation.

The district receives 700 mm of rain a year, and unlike most of Tibet there are reliable rains in early spring, enabling early planting and a long growing season by Tibetan standards. New World crops including maize, potatoes and amaranth were introduced centuries ago.

Richer landholders hired poorer ones as wage laborers, rather than owning workers as property. Beyond the fields, controls over forests and the upland pastures were collective, decisions being made by the entire settlement.

In a district where most land was steep and the forest dense, communities were isolated and intensely local in their social life. As in the Himalayas, local loyalties were strong and central authority weak. The area was proud of owing loyalty neither to far distant Lhasa nor to even farther distant Beijing. The local rulers frequently cemented alliances through marriage.

This intense localism bred a quarrelsome attitude to outsiders, and to shifting alliances within the village confederations. The wooden stockades around each village were a protection against raiders. There were well-developed institutions of conflict resolution to

ensure that local fights ended quickly. Elders in each village were empowered to negotiate settlements to disputes, and were invested with ritual wooden staffs that signified their authority to intervene, and impose compensation payments in reparation for damage.

A major factor enhancing Tibetan solidarity was the encroachment by Chinese armies, sometimes with massive force. In the 1740s, the Manchu Qing dynasty, after a series of reverses along its long frontier with Tibet, decided to mount a major military expedition, and this area was its target. The fighting lasted many years and was ruinously expensive to the Qing court. At first the Manchu rulers of China hoped to use the classic Chinese strategy of "using barbarians against barbarians" by creating alliances with local Tibetan rulers, enlisting thousands of men in the imperial army. However, the Tibetan who guided the Chinese troops through the mountains "was in fact an informant for [Tibetan defender] sLob-dpon and betrayed [Chinese governor] Zhang continuously."<sup>[25]</sup> These two wars, of 1747 to 1749 and 1771 to 1776 cost the imperial court over 61 million silver taels, because loyal Manchurian soldiers had to be sent right across China to do the fighting. By comparison, China's conquest of what is now Xinjiang, north of Tibet, and far into what is now Kazakhstan cost the court only 23 million, although that campaign also took several years.<sup>[26]</sup> This campaign was the point in which Qing China overreached itself, initiating the long slow decline of the Qing, burdened with debt and the weight of undigested empire. The resistance of the Tibetan and Qiang people was a major turning point in Chinese history.

The consequences were immediately ruinous for the Tibetans. Before the wars, according to Chinese historians of the imperial court, the local Tibetan population was over 100 000, but by the time Manchu military power had finally prevailed, this was reduced to a fraction. "The extent of the depopulation that resulted from the two Jinchuan Wars may be gauged from the fact that the registered population in the early 1820s for the entire region of Rab-drtan and bTsan-la, including not only Tibetan farmers but also the families of troops garrisoned there, only amounted to seven thousand two hundred families."<sup>[27]</sup>

One of the most detailed accounts of this area is also one of the most recent, by the courageous scholar **Muge Samten** (1914-1993), who spoke up against Communist Party nationalities policy as early as 1981, in defense of Tibetan identity. In writing of the Tibetan villages he begins by going back to when Tibetans first arrived, in the armies recruited from central Tibet who were demobilized in this area over 1 300 years ago when the Tibetan empire made peace here with the Tang dynasty of China. To this day, Muge Samten writes, the Tibetans to the east of Jiuzhaigou, at the very edge of the Tibetan Plateau and of Tibetan settlement, in what is now called Pingwu county, call themselves Dagpo, after the district east of Lhasa where their ancestors were recruited to become soldiers. Around Jiuzhaigou, Tibetans often call themselves Khonpo, after Kongpo, in the south east of central Tibet. Around Hongyuan they are known as Sharba, signifying descent from soldiers recruited from far western Tibet.<sup>[28]</sup>

Muge Samten describes daily life vividly: "In terms of mutual respect between old and young and mutual respect between men and women, Dwags po people are identical to other Tibetans. Such customs as sitting cross-legged, men cutting the meat, and women

kneading the dough for noodles are also pan-Tibetan customs. Houses are square and made of stone, and have a south-facing enclosed yard. They have a wooden ladder-like staircase. The livestock live downstairs, the people live upstairs. Offerings are arranged on top of a cupboard and such things as porcelain bowls and brass platters are arranged in the cupboard. In the centre of the house there is a metal brazier with three legs, and the head of the household sits at the head of the hearth or toward the north. There is a room for religious offerings on the top floor, and grass and straw are stored above that. With the exception of officials and rich people, no-one has stools or tables—this is also like other Tibetans.”<sup>[29]</sup>

From a Tibetan viewpoint, the steep but glacially rounded valleys of Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong are not up in the mountains but down below the pasture lands. The two valleys are connected by the sacred mountain Shar Dungri, a major regional pilgrimage site and power place associated with the oldest of Tibetan religions, the pre-Buddhist Bon. As with many of Tibet’s most sacred mountains, Shar Dungri is on Tibet’s borders, a guardian looking down onto the lowlands beyond Tibet.

Bon is central to the identity of the Sharba Tibetans. Within Jiuzhaigou World Heritage area there is a Bon monastery which in the late 1990s had survived the Cultural Revolution, and a recent fire, and rebuilt itself to strength of 67 monks. Before visitors reach Jiuzhaigou their tour buses pass another Bon monastery, Dartse Gonpa, where “currently there are 91 monks, studying under a khenpo [scholar and teacher] from Menri near Zhigatse.”<sup>[30]</sup> Other Bon monasteries are nearby: “Just before reaching the source of the Zung-chu, the road passes through the village of Shadri, below the sacred Mount Jadur. The largest Bon monastery of the region, known as Gamil Gonchen or Pal Shenten Dechenling, is located by the roadside, and has an enormous prayer wheel at its entrance. The monastery was founded some 600 years ago. Currently there are 450 monks and one tulku [reincarnate lama] in residence. The complex has an Assembly Hall and three colleges. In the main hall of the Dukhang there are images of [Bon founder] Shenrab Miwoche. Since it is beside the main road to Dzitsa Degu National Park (Ch: Jiuzhaigou), Gamil Gonpa receives many Chinese tour buses, although most visitors only stay a short while.”<sup>[31]</sup>

Bon, with its earthy approach to the spirits of waters and mountains, survives in this frontier district despite all obstacles, because of the loyalty of the Sharba Tibetan communities. The obstacles are not just Communist Party hostility to religion but also the historic dominance within Tibet of a variety of Buddhism that found Bon unacceptable, even though Bon over the centuries took on a Buddhist outlook and the practices of Buddhism. After the Manchu armies finally defeated the Sharba and Khonpo Tibetans of this area in the 1770s, the Chinese emperor agreed to a request from Lhasa to declare orthodox Buddhism the chief tradition of Tibet. Bon worshippers were discriminated against, flourishing only in remote and rugged peripheries.<sup>[32]</sup> Now among the worldwide Tibetan Diasporas there is a growing appreciation that Bon is the deepest extant facet of Tibetan culture, and a fresh approach to Bon as the door to the thousands of years of pre-Buddhist Tibetan civilization. This makes Bon and those areas where it has survived persecution by both Chinese and Tibetan state power somewhat special.

State penetration of Tibetan civil society in recent times has fractured the economic, cultural and linguistic links of the Sharba Tibetans. The Sharba (or Sharwa, which is closer to actual pronunciation) are part of the Tibetan province of Amdo, the northernmost part of Tibet. A contemporary authority on Bonpo Tibet, **Samten Karmay** wrote, after visiting the Sharwa in 1985: "The people of this region are known locally as Sharwa, a term derived from the local name of the region, Sharkhog. Our historian Gedun Choepel has suggested that most of these Amdo people are descendants of the royal army from Central Tibet who came to the area in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, an idea which seems to fit the Dunhuang records. The population of the region, who are sedentary, number around 24,000, according to the local administrative authority. The predominant religion of the Sharwa is Bon, but small pockets of Gelugpa and Sakyapa followers are also found in the area. Villages used to be grouped according to a political federation system in which from four to seven villages, with a sacred mountain and a monastery for education and religious gathering, comprised a federation. Each federation had its own leaders as well as social and political institutions: elected council, militia for self-defense (each family needed to have a good horse and a gun ready whenever required) and a general assembly of adult men. Like most parts of Amdo, the region of Sharkhog was a semi-independent principality before 1950; it paid no kind of tax either to central Tibet or to the local Chinese authorities. The historic relationship between this Tibetan region and the local Chinese town is one of conflict."<sup>[33]</sup>

The chronic tension between Chinese urban garrisons and Tibetan farmers erupted into open war in the 1740s, 1770s, 1860s and 1920s. This is documented in detail by historical sources from all parties. What is less openly admitted is that there was energetic resistance to the Chinese Communist Party, initially when the Long March passed through in 1935, then in the 1950s when the Party returned with the full force of the Chinese state behind it. This is still a taboo subject, contradicting the official insistence that the red Army came as liberators and were welcomed as such by Tibetans.

One response of Chinese state power has been to fragment this fractious area, which is split between three of China's provinces. Jiuzhaigou and Hongyuan are in the far north of Sichuan, nearly 400 km from the provincial capital, while nearby areas of Amdo are in Gansu province, further north, and in Qinghai province to the northwest. Political power over this area is exercised by three distant provincial capitals: Chengdu, Lanzhou and Xining, and by farther distant Beijing. For all these cities Sharkhog and areas nearby are peripheral. Yet all are of concern because of their record of rebellion, and because they are major Tibetan tourist attractions these provincial capitals can use to attract visitors to metropolitan airports and city hotels. They are en route to major monasteries such as Labrang in Gansu, and Rebkong in Qinghai, famous for its appliqué artists and sculptors. The combination of historic monastery and a historic natural beauty makes for a profitable tourist circuit that starts and ends in a Chinese metropolis.

The resistance in Jiuzhaigou to Chinese hegemony was evident in the 1980s to an American ethnographer, **Hill Gates**. In 1988, as her bus approached Jiuzhaigou, she asked to get out and walk, so as to appreciate the beauty. But the Chinese cadre responsible for her said: "We couldn't let you go alone on this road especially, you see. Some of the Tibetans are not very happy about the changes, and there have been

incidents. One of them tried to throw a rock at me this morning, did you see?"<sup>[34]</sup> The cadre "had visited the valley before the new road opened it to the public, and knew some horror stories about local Han being attacked by Tibetans resenting the intrusion of tourism. It is he who insists that I ride. They really would be terribly worried about me if I were unescorted."<sup>[35]</sup>

As she goes deeper into Jiuzhaigou, Hill Gates discovers why, even in 1988, long before today's torrent of visitors, Tibetans might feel alienated. She passes a Tibetan village "not two hundred yards from the park entrance" but her Chinese minders tell her no Tibetan houses are available to be visited, even though the Tibetans live there are employed as hotel attendants. [36] She walks past, and then climbs: "Up a substantial mountain, badly logged off, through a valley with bright wood-fronted houses, up a big mountain, with snow enough to remind us to hurry-and we break into the grassland. Yak heaven." On the grassland Tibetan life appears intact. Both herds and nomadic black tents are plentiful. But she also discovers fences laboriously constructed of cut sod, a legacy of the Cultural Revolution when, all over Tibet, in the name of civilization and higher yields, nomads were made to divide and fence land, and compulsorily settle. There was no money for wire fences, but compulsory labor was at the disposal of the state, able to mobilize at command. This sod fence: "stands about a meter high, eighteen inches thick, and runs for miles, sometimes on both sides of the road. Why would herders who normally move freely over an undivided plain build a huge stretch of fencing and then abandon it? My guess at an answer is later confirmed by cautious questions. During the Cultural Revolution, the authorities made great efforts to settle nomads such as these Tibetans. Along this road, the land was divided and put under commune ownership. The Han made the Tibetans build walls to mark boundaries and restrict the cattle's movements. This experiment failed. The herders hated it... Animals were not properly cared for, their products went to waste. Production fell and resentment grew... In the region of the useless walls, we pass several villages of nomads who had been forcefully settled during the Cultural Revolution. These Tibetans are filthy squatters, growing a few young apple trees, keeping some horses, making do. The scruffy villages are full of poor, ill-clad, and fierce-looking young men (they elicit the nervous description 'savages' from my [Chinese] companions)."<sup>[37]</sup> Later, she comes upon the ruins of a monastery destroyed by revolutionary zealots, whose remaining carved mantra stones are carefully piled under a protective array of wind horse prayer flags, waiting the day the monastery might be rebuilt. She wonders who "collected the pieces, stored them until it was safe to make them public, and in a ceremony that must have involved many working hands, a good deal of money, and much prayer, deposited them on the green grass to await better times... The gauzy temple, no barrier to wind, rain, or the passage of beasts, is the finest metaphor I have ever seen for the strength of the weak."<sup>[38]</sup>

This Tibetan grassland above the Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong valleys is never mentioned in Jiuzhaigou tourist brochures. The interdependence of Tibetan farming valleys and upland herding areas is excised. Jiuzhaigou stands alone, no longer integrated into Tibetan life, identity and economy. It exists exceptionally, outside time and space, connected by bus, highway, helicopter and airport to metropolitan Chengdu and contemporary China's tourism industry. It has been re-oriented.

Chinese state intervention in Jiuzhaigou Tibetan life and identity did not end with the collapse of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Soon there began an official inquiry into whether the Sharwa and Dagpo are really Tibetans at all. The proposed alternative was to re-designate them as a separate nationality to be known as the Baima.

In China for almost 50 years ethnicity has been decided not by individuals but the state, which classifies peoples according to materialist principles defined by the ethnographer Joseph Stalin. The process whereby the Chinese state decides which minority ethnicities to recognize is conducted by Chinese ethnographers, historians and other experts, not by the minorities. The subjective sense of identity that peoples have is only one factor in making this legislative, prescriptive decision. The main criteria are material, such as dress, house design, clothing, and language differences, anything amenable to measurement. When Chinese authorities first assessed the hundreds of applications for minority nationality status in the 1950s, the official list reduced China's diversity to 55 officially recognized nationalities. The Tibetans, including the Dagpo and Sharwa were, for obvious reasons, classified as one people. But in the 1970s Chinese authorities in Sichuan moved to reopen the question as to whether the Tibetans of Jiuzhaigou, Huanglong and surrounding districts were in fact Tibetan.

As China struggled to recover from the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, an all-Chinese investigating team was assembled in Chengdu, the provincial capital, to determine the objective truth. Old imperial annals were consulted, to decide if their vague references to barbarian tribes beyond China's frontiers referred specifically to these people. Much was made of the wearing of felt hats, and the putting of feathers in them, by the locals of Nanping County. Likewise their Bon religion, their dialect, their use of yak-cow cross breeds as draft animals, their weaving of flax into cloth and wrapping the legs in cloth leggings were all taken as objective evidence, in accordance with Marxist materialism, that these people were unlike Tibetans. There were suggestions that these people were gentler and their traditional economy more co-operative than the feudal serfdom of the Tibetans. This was a vital distinction. The savage class warfare of the Cultural Revolution was fresh in everyone's mind, and in minority areas the savagery of the class war depended crucially on whether the ethnic minority was classified as feudal or pre-feudal, meaning a more collective attitude to material goods, almost a natural inclination towards communism. Pre-feudal societies did not require an attack on the core beliefs and practices of the society, while feudal Tibet required that everything old be smashed before socialism could begin. Not surprisingly, "in the eyes of many Tibetans the official reopening of these cases represented yet another attack by the Chinese state on Tibetan identity that had been severely fractured by the social and political upheavals of the previous 20 years."<sup>[39]</sup>

The Chinese experts were strongly of the opinion that the objects of their scrutiny were not really Tibetans, although there was no agreement on what an alternative designation ought to be. **Muge Samten**, a learned geshe before the arrival of the Chinese Communist Party was one of a few Tibetan scholars to publicly contradict and vigorously ridicule this one-month investigation. He wrote bluntly of the Chinese legislative gaze: "Now as for this method research, what sort of dialectical materialism is this? Pretending to have totally mastered everything by means of a little more than a month of research,

they sit there determined, sit there without even looking at or coming to know the customs and habits of those Tibetans who are so close to the Dwags po such as those of Nanping [Jiuzhaigou] and Zung chu [Songpan and Huanglong], and, after trotting out those customs and habits which are one and the same as those of the Tibetans of Nanping and Zung chu they sit there postulating that the Dwags po are not Tibetan! They sit there placidly in their blind, ignorant way.”<sup>[40]</sup>

China under **Deng Xiaoping** had little interest in reclassifying minorities, and wanted to get on with getting rich. The official outcome was an awkward compromise. It is now Chinese practice to call these people **Baima Tibetans**, “thus marking them as both Tibetan and not quite Tibetan (since they require an adjective to qualify their identity)... There exists the perceived danger that the qualifiers will eventually become more important than the root noun, thereby leading to ever greater factional- and fractionalization (both social and political) of the Tibetan population within the PRC.”<sup>[41]</sup>

From the 1740s through to the present, the Tibetans of Jiuzhaigou have resisted Chinese hegemony whenever they could. As that hegemony became overwhelming, in the tide of tourist colonialism, Tibetans also sought to make use of official Chinese policy for their own purposes, and find employment and business opportunities in the World Heritage/Biosphere Reserves. The Tibetans were never passive victims.

Ethnographers doing fieldwork in Jiuzhaigou in the 1990s report that tourism has also provided opportunities for Tibetans. **Lawrence Epstein** and **Peng Wenbin**, of the University of Washington Anthropology Department, find that in Tibetan villages, “one member of each household has been employed by the Tourist Bureau during the tourist season (April-October) as workers to protect the forest, construct roads or clean up garbage. Tourist services run by local villagers themselves range from renting horses or native costumes for photography to tourists, the handicrafts and souvenir trade, folkloric entertainment, to running inns.”<sup>[42]</sup> Monetized incomes have risen as tourists pay to witness an antiquated Tibetanness at odds with the lived reality of contemporary employment as garbage collectors, maintenance workers and in staged displays of authentic Tibetan culture. Epstein and Peng focus on three of the most senior Tibetans, and their skilful use of the official line to rework concepts of Tibetan identity. The abbot of Rabwen monastery, the teacher of Tibetan dance and the director of an “ethnic culture village” set up within a Tibetan village, all adopt different strategies.

The abbot uses official policy to reconnect Jiuzhaigou with the Tibetan heartland to the west, emphasizing lineage and genealogy. “Through his cooperation with the Tourist Bureau, Rab dben [Rabwen] monastery, once a haven for rebels in the 1950s and still unofficially rehabilitated by the government, has become prosperous (mostly through tourism) and once again acts an important focal point for the revival of local religious activities. By manipulating state policy, which focused on delinking small local monasteries to larger ones within an area to prevent alliances among them, he has managed to make Rad dben (and Jiuzhaigou) into a central and autonomous focal point. His relative authority and advocacy of local autonomy, has caused other officials in bureaus like the United Front, to accuse him of using his position as a local religious leader and a government official for self-aggrandizement.”

The dance teacher is an expert in the one aspect of Tibetan identity that is most marketable to tourists and to Chinese tourism enterprises hiring Tibetans. However, Jiuzhaigou is in Amdo, and he is from another of Tibet's three great provinces, Kham. Although Kham and Amdo are adjacent, the Amdowa and Khampa dialects of Tibetan are almost mutually unintelligible, and differences are many. From a Chinese viewpoint the entire area is part of Kanze prefecture in Sichuan province, and the fact that the prefecture includes parts of both Kham and Amdo is invisible to Chinese officials. The dance teacher "is an outsider, a sort of missionary of high Tibetan culture," who has persuaded Chinese authorities that the dances he stages at Jiuzhaigou are of the highest standard, in an area where local authorities are keen to tell tourists they are being "introduced to an elevated and cultured minority." However the Amdowa young women of Jiuzhaigou "were not willing to join the troupe because they could make more money doing other things." As a result, the troupe of ten dancers are mostly Han Chinese, for whom the director "has composed several songs and dances based on local themes, the rest being standard Khamba repertoire and Chinese songs, since tourists are encouraged to 'sing-along'."

The director of the Ethnic Culture Village-within-a-village adopts another strategy, emphasizing both the genuine and unique local culture and at the same time appropriating the anti Chinese revolts of the past as patriotic stirrings of revolutionary sentiment. The brochure in his name given to tourists proclaims Jiuzhaigou an "ancient and typical Tibetan village... exhibiting the material and spiritual culture of Jiuzhaigou Tibetans, a site to propagate Marxist nationalities policy."<sup>[43]</sup> He boldly rewrites the rebellion of the 1860s as a precursor to the Chinese revolution: "One cannot help but burst into tears on reading and reflecting how they died for their country, an encouragement to future generations." Epstein and Peng comment on his ability to elicit "state support to complete his project, and thus had to count things in the state idiom... meant to satisfy the state's agenda of turning tourist sites into a means of instilling historical pride and patriotic education." The brochure even claims that men of Jiuzhaigou fought the British during the opium war of the 1840s.

Each of these local leaders attempts to maintain and enhance local autonomy for Tibetan communities. Each uses weapons of the weak, piling up their **mani** stones, remnants of an overwhelmed civilization, until the day agency is regained.

But meanwhile the resort life cycle follows its inexorable logic. In the short life of Jiuzhaigou as a tourist destination, the financial foundation was laid by ordinary Chinese holidaymakers travelling not very far. Chinese and Canadian geographers have carefully quantified who the visitors to Jiuzhaigou were, what were their occupations, and how far they travelled to reach Jiuzhaigou, in the years between 1988 and 1994.<sup>[44]</sup> This survey found most tourists were employed by Chinese schools, factories and government departments, few had travelled more than 1,000 kilometers and they mostly considered themselves to be of less than average Chinese income.

This has now changed. Jiuzhaigou has steadily repositioned itself up market, attracting arrivals from greater distances, with greater discretionary spending power, willing to pay for higher standard accommodation. It is no longer a destination but a resort. The attraction of Jiuzhaigou is no longer just its landscape beauty and the ethnic dances of

the Tibetans, but a combination of such spectacle with luxury accommodation in five star hotels and luxury villas owned privately by the new rich to entertain friends and clients.

Retained profits have been reinvested in this gradual move up market, to the point where Jiuzhaigou is now marketed internationally, as well as among Chinese expatriates and domestic tourists. The resort life cycle has moved on. As saturation approaches, Jiuzhaigou is able to switch to premium payers rather than a constant escalation of visitor numbers. At the urging of Sichuan province, Jiuzhaigou was one of ten top tourist destinations in 2000 to be freed from state price controls that made admission to the World Heritage/Biosphere Reserves affordable for all. <sup>[45]</sup>

As the areas surrounding this "wilderness" intensify their resource use, energy consumption, waste generation, greenhouse gas emissions and total ecological footprint, the time has come to ask whether UNESCO and global science have failed. The concept of both the UNESCO MAB Biosphere reserves and World heritage List sites is that agreed management plans be adhered to, for the purpose of limiting human impacts and conserving biodiversity. The opposite is happening. It could well be argued that UNESCO's inscription of these areas as both World Heritage and as Biosphere Reserves was the kiss of death, that these labels gave the areas such cachet that Chinese marketers have cashed in heavily, to the detriment of the values inscription was meant to enhance.

This is especially evident if one looks at the nearby Wanglang nature reserve, which borders on both Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong. Wanglang, of 323 km<sup>2</sup>, limits tourists staying overnight in the reserve to a maximum of fifty, requires them to carry away all garbage, and even requests visitors to dress in natural colors, avoid bright clothing, not make loud noises, play music or honk horns. <sup>[46]</sup> Without much publicity, this reserve quietly gets on with doing the very things World Heritage and Biosphere Reserves are supposed to do.

Meanwhile there seems to be no end to how intensively Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong can be and will be overdeveloped. In February 2002 the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development announced it was investing US\$20.5 million "for the construction of the Huanglong Airport in Jiuzhaigou in Southwest China's Sichuan Province. The Chinese and Kuwait ministries of finance signed an agreement in Beijing yesterday. The Huanglong Airport, which demands a total investment of 777 million yuan (US\$93.6 million), is expected to handle 600,000 passengers annually by 2010." <sup>[47]</sup> This will make it by far the busiest airport on the Tibetan Plateau. The Kuwaitis agreed to a grace period of four years in which neither interest nor capital will have to be paid on the loan, so the debt can be serviced by revenues generated once the airport is operational. The agreement establishing the loan is government-to-government, signaling the extent to which Jiuzhaigou is seen as a national project. The Kuwaiti finance provides 21.9 % of the total cost of construction, with the rest financed by the Sichuan and national governments, including allocation of monies raised through sale of bonds. <sup>[48]</sup>

Some wealthy visitors already fly in. There is presently a small airfield at Jiuzhaigou and in late 2000 the first flights began. <sup>[49]</sup> A helipad was constructed some years ago.

Airports are not the only official investment in upgrading public infrastructure for easier access and heavier visitor inflows. The highway to Jiuzhaigou from Sichuan's capital,

Chengdu, is again to be upgraded. Construction work is on such a scale that China's truck industry announced the project as a key reason why it expects "the need for heavy and middle-size trucks will keep growing."<sup>[50]</sup>

Jiuzhaigou has attained such a high level of brand recognition that Gansu, the province to the north of Sichuan, now plans tour itineraries that include Jiuzhaigou as well as the major attractions of the Tibetan southern prefecture of Gansu.<sup>[51]</sup>

The 5,000 hotel rooms at Jiuzhaigou already attract China's new rich, some of whom are investing further in the move further up market. A Washington Post article, In China, the rich seek to become the 'big rich', names **Dèng Hóng** as the latest real estate developer to create wealth in Jiuzhaigou. Deng migrated to the US, bought property in Hawaii and Silicon Valley before returning to China because, as he told the Washington Post, "becoming 'big rich' in China was easier than in the United States. He was right: At last count he owned 35 cars, including a Ferrari, a Lamborghini, some jeeps, a Corvette, several 600 series Mercedes-Benzes and a fat Lincoln Continental. He recently purchased the rights to develop 100 square miles of land next door to one of China's national parks [Jiuzhaigou]"<sup>[52]</sup> How did Dèng Hóng get so rich, and how will Jiuzhaigou make him richer? "Many of China's wealthiest people are members of the Communist Party or are relatives or friends of party members and have parlayed their connections into cash. Deng is an example. His father was an officer in China's air force. Deng, in addition to his military background, has assiduously cultivated ties with the city government of Chengdu. Ask him which is more important, his relationship to other businessmen or to the government, and he does not hesitate: 'I really don't have anything to do with my fellow businessmen,' he said, echoing other well-off Chinese. 'My business depends on the government.' So much so that last year Deng surrendered 30 per cent of his stake in the convention centre to the Chengdu city government, for nothing. One of his senior executives is the former deputy mayor of Chengdu. For his development project next to the national park in western Sichuan, he has hired retired government officials. Deng had to rely on government ties to win approval to develop that site, 260 km<sup>2</sup> of land next to one of China's last remaining wilderness areas, Jiu Zhai Gou. Deng plans to build 100 vacation homes, a five-star hotel and a golf course. Each vacation home will sell for at least \$300,000, he said."<sup>[53]</sup>

What could induce such a wealthy man to give away his stake in a lucrative convention centre in a major metropolis, unless the deal gave him access to an even greater profit opportunity?

The destination cycle is about to climax. Jiuzhaigou is to become a playground for the super rich, a privatized space in which business and pleasure can be mixed, and conducted away from any public gaze, on golf courses, in luxury villas, in five-star hotel suites, and against a backdrop of stunning landscape beauty in a World Heritage Biosphere Reserve. The combination is irresistible. In this latest incarnation Jiuzhaigou is losing altogether its last moorings to space and place, to a long local history, and to its locatedness in the Tibetan world.

It requires a local beauty spot to become first a mass market destination for holidays, rewards, banquets, payoffs, then to become a resort for the global rich, a suitably exotic backdrop for elaborate rituals of chineseness in which Tibetans remain less than fully

human exotica, dancing and clearing away the garbage, their lives highly regulated by global science and money power.

As JZG becomes a full resort, with lux hotels, brothels, disco, nightclubs, Tibetan dancers in a package, the locals are more marginalized as big money takes over.

The paradox is remarkable. Heavily-promoted sites of Chinese nostalgia for a lost world of harmony with nature, to be found in Jiuzhaigou and nearby Huanglong are case studies in the new post industrial economy likely to shape Tibet. These areas were first to drop conventional plans for industrialization, and invest heavily in a post industrial future instead, for several reasons:

- Part of China's campaign to foster patriotic identification with China among Taiwanese and Chinese living in SE Asia was to advertise destinations of quintessential Chineseness, places to commune with the ancestors, be renewed by classic Chinese landscapes and experience a oneness with nature not readily found in Taiwanese factory belts or Hong Kong sweatshops. Jiuzhaigou had all the elements that compose a classical Chinese landscape painting.
- The promotion of Jiuzhaigou gradually accelerated, first attracting Chinese from abroad and large numbers of Chinese domestic tourists, finally being marketed at foreign tourists generally
- The local counties and prefecture had few other prospects for wealth creation and in fact, not long after tourism promotion began, the national government abruptly banned the other major source of revenue and employment, in the logging industry. Conventional primary and secondary industries—logging and the processing of saw logs—were suddenly ended, and new sources of income were urgently needed.
- A major pool of newly rich urban wealth is nearby in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan. In order to add value to Sichuan as a tour destination, Jiuzhaigou slotted in well to tour itineraries that also took tourists to the Songpan Tibetan grasslands nearby.

In telling the story of the postindustrial transformation of the Nine Stockade Villages so far, the focus has been on the contradictions between international scientific bureaucracies seeking to conserve non-human mammals, and Chinese state bureaucracies at national and local levels seeking to maximize economic gain for non-Tibetan Chinese human mammals. All along, these divergent agendas have impacted on the one mammal population none of these authorities considered primary—the Tibetans.

From the outset, the Tibetan farmers of Dzitsa Degu were considered to be intrinsic to the charms of the area. For example, Beijing's Foreign Languages Press in 1990 published a handsome volume of color photos of the Tibetan and Qiang ethnic communities, not only in Jiuzhaigou but throughout the prefecture in which Jiuzhaigou is located, Aba Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Ngawa in Tibetan). The foreword states: "In this album the author tells us that outside the place in which we work and live there are boundless horizons and countless people with different lifestyles who are happily creating and developing according to the laws of nature. Mother Nature bestows her love and favors impartially upon all earthlings. As far as happiness goes, a multimillionaire sitting in his luxurious office and dealing with information computed in milliseconds does not necessarily squeeze more joy from life than a girl of the prairies

milking cows to the strains of herdsmen's songs."<sup>[54]</sup> This situates the reader firmly in the contemporary urban world, and the Tibetans as children of nature. On the nature-culture spectrum, they are very much at the nature end.

UNESCO's formal criteria for inscribing an area as World Heritage includes Clause 14: "Participation of local people in the nomination process is essential to make them feel a shared responsibility with the State Party in the maintenance of the site."<sup>[55]</sup> Local Tibetans did not participate in the formalities of the nomination process. How could simple children of nature possibly do so? From the outset China defined local participation to be the involvement of the lower levels of the Chinese state itself, namely the senior cadres of Nanping and Songpan county administrations. According to the Party line, they represented the will of the masses, as does the Chinese state at the centre in Beijing. There neither were, nor are, any organizations of Tibetans, for any purpose, outside the organs of state power.

Thus it was entirely at the discretion of the state, especially at county level, to decide where the Tibetans slotted in. Another online guide to Jiuzhaigou captures the role of the Tibetans in the wider context: "Jiuzhaigou is located in Aba Tibet and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province in China. Its beautiful scenery makes it a fantastic fairyland. The majestic and unrivalled emerald lakes, layers of waterfalls, colorful forest, snow peaks and Tibetan folkways form a perfection of itself, which is called 'A Wonderland.'"<sup>[56]</sup> This inclusion of the Tibetans, not as stakeholders with prior claim to local power, but as part of the list of natural color, accords with the attitude of global science. UNESCO, as its name states, administers science and culture as separate domains. That separation is formalized in UNESCO's criteria Operational Guidelines for World Heritage listing, requiring that areas nominated by governments for listing be classified either as cultural properties (Guidelines 23 to 42) or as natural properties (Guidelines 43 to 45). Jiuzhaigou is a natural heritage property, as per Guideline 44, section (a), subsection (iii), which is defined as containing: "superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional beauty and aesthetic importance." Under these criteria, the traditional owners, cultivators and curators of that landscape can only be incidental, their presence in no way acknowledged in the definition.

Neither Jiuzhaigou nor nearby Huanglong were nominated as cultural landscapes, a separate UNESCO category (Guidelines 36 to 39) for "combined works of nature and of man... illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time... [that] embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment. Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use... and a specific spiritual relation to nature... The continued existence of traditional forms of land-use supports biological diversity in many regions of the world... A continuing landscape is one which retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life."

If China had nominated Jiuzhaigou as a cultural landscape, the Tibetan villagers would have been central, and remained central. There is no evidence that such a nomination was ever considered. From the outset Jiuzhaigou was nature, not culture.

As culture, the Nine Stockade Villages were part of the classic Tibetan pattern of upland nomadic pasturage and valley cultivation of grain, existing interdependently. The alpine

meadow pastures of the Tibetan yak herders are so close by Jiuzhaigou that American zoologist **George Schaller** in a morning walked up from what is now the last bus stop at Ritse (Rize in Chinese), “up a well-worn livestock path to the west of the Rizegou until forest gives way to alpine grassland. Five blue eared pheasants, plump blue-gray birds, flush from a thicket with a clatter of wings and nasal cackles. Herdsmen use these pastures heavily in summer and still [1983] burn forest to increase grazing land, but this early in the season [May] we have the uplands to ourselves.”<sup>[57]</sup> This grassland, as a few Chinese authors acknowledge, stretches continuously westward to Hungary, and north east to Manchuria.

That Jiuzhaigou is situated in, and surrounded by Tibetan yak pasture does not at all fit with Chinese conceptions of Jiuzhaigou’s exceptionalism, its standing outside of time and space. The deeply structured relationships of valley farmers and upland nomads are edited out of all accounts of Jiuzhaigou, enabling it to be situated instead as an instance of World Heritage, and a place for the multimillionaire in a luxurious office dealing in information broken into milliseconds to find peace of mind.

Yet another fragmentation is imposed on these people by their inclusion, at the sub provincial level, in a prefecture that is otherwise almost entirely in Kham, the great province of eastern Tibet now split between no less than four Chinese provinces: TAR, Sichuan, Qinghai and Yunnan. By placing the Amdowa Tibetans of Sharkhog in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, the Sharwa are a minority within the Khampa Tibetan minority within Sichuan. Khampa and Amdowa dialects of Tibetan are almost mutually incomprehensible. Tibetans see this official fragmentation as part of a Chinese response to their long history of objection to Chinese power.

Jiuzhaigou is well on the way to becoming a global brand. It has transcended the origins embedded in its name—the nine stockade Tibetan villages—and Chinese official media now mention in passing that: “The region, formerly the site of nine Tibetan villages, has become well known in recent years for its network of alpine lakes, spectacular waterfalls and impressive vegetation.”<sup>[58]</sup>

While UNESCO has inscribed heritage and conservation meanings onto Jiuzhaigou, fresh inscriptions add new meanings. Jiuzhaigou is now weighted with national and international agendas, as it comes more and more to be the quintessentialised Chinese landscape. It is little wonder the Tibetans are being extruded, with no place in such elaborate state projects. Jiuzhaigou has become the ideal site in which to soften the deep seated popular ill-will between Japan and China. In 2000, in a cooperative venture between Japan’s NHK television network and Sichuan TV, a soap opera serial was filmed in Jiuzhaigou for broadcast both in Japan and China on nationwide CCTV. The plot of this improbable soapy “tells about how a Japanese businessman has developed friendly business ties with a young Chinese of ethnic Qiang group. The viewers will be able to have a better understanding about the Chinese people and enjoy beautiful landscapes.”<sup>[59]</sup> Its’ title is A Valley Reddens under the Shine of Cherry.

Despite all of these obstacles, the 930 Tibetans who currently live within the Jiuzhaigou World Heritage area are in no way a defeated people, or victims.

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